

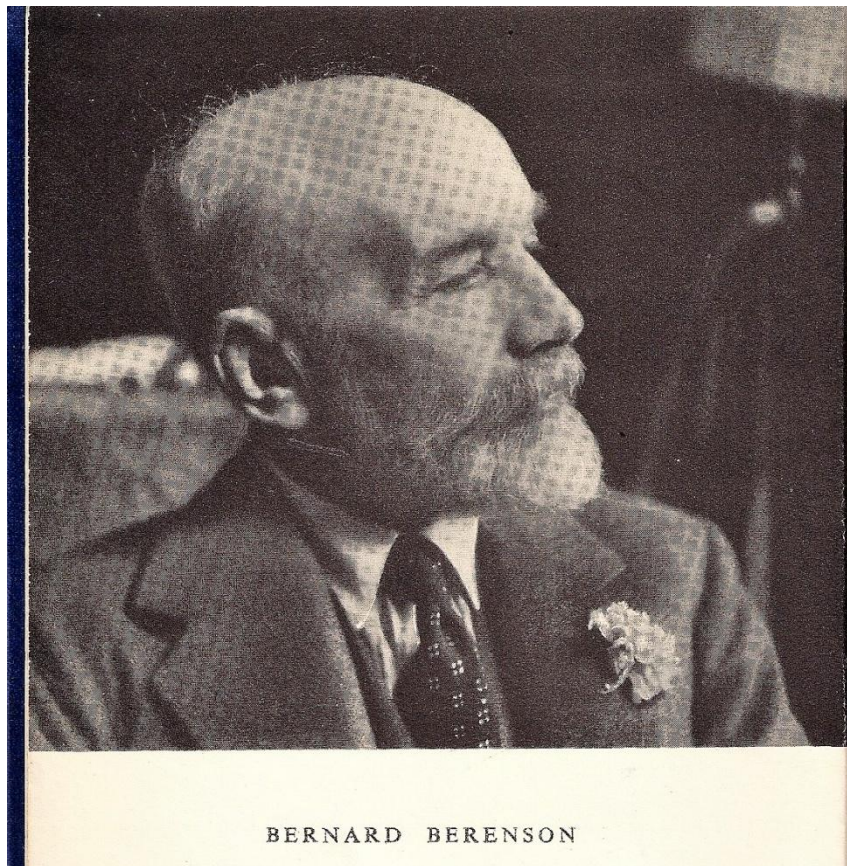
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Jobst C. Knigge

Ernest Hemingway and Bernard  
Berenson

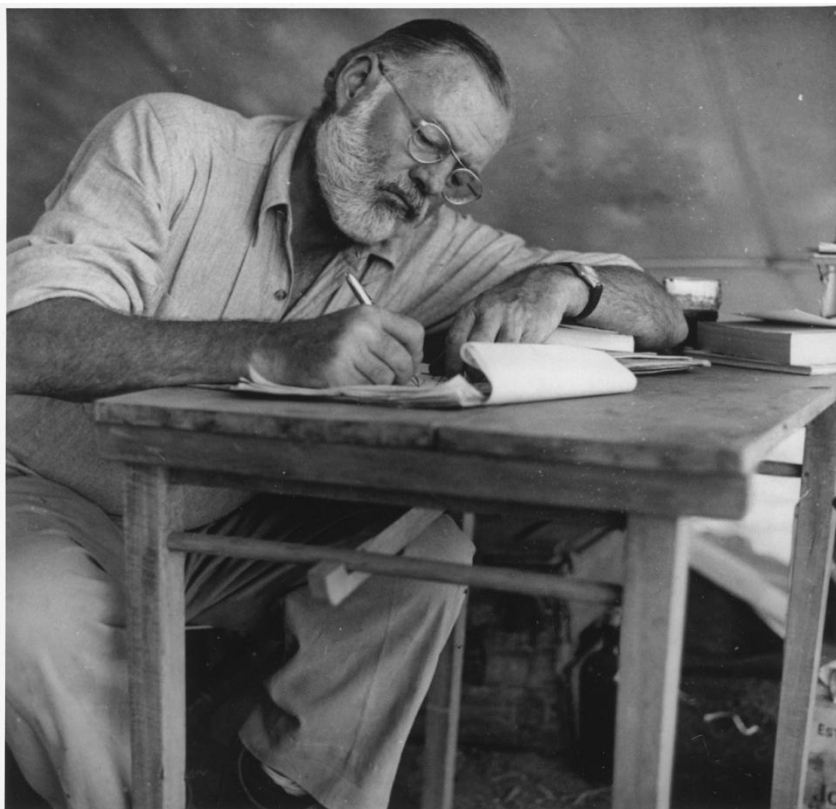
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*A Strange Friendship*



**Berenson (Sketch for a Self Portrait)**

**Hemingway (Kennedy Library)**



## Introduction

Why did Ernest Hemingway chose art historian Bernard Berenson as partner for a nearly eight year long correspondence? And why did Berenson pick up the thread. They were a very unlikely couple. The letters flew between the “Finca” near Cuban capital Havanna and the villa “I Tatti” in the hills of Tuscany.

One can hardly imagine a greater contrast. On one side Hemingway who was anything but an intellectual. He was a non-academic. He went directly from school into life – or better into nearly death - when he came as an American Red Cross volunteer to the Italian battlefield of the First World War. He was just 18 years old. He never went to university and did not study privately, his reading was not systematic and remained superficial.

He was a man of action and enjoyed sports like boxing, cycling, fishing and hunting. He projected himself as the absolute He-Man and preferred the scenes of wars rather than museums, art galleries and libraries. But he was a very successful author culminating his career in his novel “The Old Man and the Sea”, winning the Nobel Prize.

When he came in contact with Berenson he was 50 years old. He had lost his film star good looks of his Paris years in the 1920. He had gained weight, had a bulging stomach and tried to hide his balding by combing his white hair to the front. His scruffy beard covered up his scaly skin that had too much Caribbean sunburn. He did not care to dress up. Often he used to wear the SS-leather belt he had brought back as a war trophy from World War Two. And he had a big alcohol problem.

But he had become a myth in his own lifetime. He was one of the most, perhaps the most famous writer, and many of his books were made into movies with great stars.

On the other hand there was Bernard Berenson, more than 34 years his senior, a member of the international intellectual elite. The subtle minded art historian was 84 years old, when Hemingway chose to get in touch with him. He lived in another world. He rarely left his villa “I Tatti” on a hillside at Settignano in Tuscany surrounded by his always growing art collection and his library of ten-thousands of books and his beautiful formal garden.



**Villa “I Tatti”**

As a kind of dandy<sup>1</sup> he took great care with his clothing, his neatly clipped beard and his entire outer aspect, that gave him – originally coming from a humble Jewish family of Lithuania - an aristocratic appearance.

When Mary Hemingway first met him, she wrote of “our fragile host, a fashion plate in his citified, faultless blue suit, gray fedora and frayed suede gloves.”<sup>2</sup> Biographer Meryl Secrest writes: “He was a small slim

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<sup>1</sup> A bit like photographer Cecil Beaton or writer Tom Wolfe.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Welsh Hemingway, *How it was*, p. 230.

figure, always impeccably dressed and groomed, with a fresh flower in his buttonhole, or, if it was evening, wearing black tie."<sup>3</sup>

BB as he became known to his friends was a kind of "myth in his own time", cultivating his "image of the aesthete and scholar ... dedicating a lifetime to Beauty and Art".<sup>4</sup> He was a world renowned personality and there was a stream of visitors trying to have a look at him or exchange a few words.

"I Tatti" was a place of pilgrimage. He was called "The Sage of Settignano"<sup>5</sup>, and was taken as a kind of a guru. The London "Times" wrote in his obituary in November 1959: "The attraction he exercised upon others was pre-eminently that of a sage, a humanist, and a stimulator."

The exchange of letters between the two men lasted from 1949 to 1957, nearly eight years. The author of this essay could consult 32 Hemingway letters and 26 Berenson letters. BB's letters were mostly written in his villa in Settignano or his countryhouse in Vallombroso. But Berenson and Hemingway never met, though there would have been the opportunity during Hemingway's visits to Venice, only two hundred miles from Florence.

For Hemingway it was the period of his hopeless love affair with the young Venetian Adriana Ivancich, who became his muse. These were the years when he wrote his books "Across the River and into the Trees" and "The Old Man and the Sea", of his Nobel Prize and of his long African Safari.

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<sup>3</sup> Meryle Secrest, *Being Bernard Berenson*, p. 6. Imagine Hemingway in a frac. He would have to dress one in Stockholm for the Nobel ceremony, but he did not attend.

<sup>4</sup> Secrest, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Cumming (ed.), „My Dear BB“, p. 283.

Hemingway's nearly fatal aircrashes left his already impaired health in ruins. Increasingly he suffered from mental problems and writer's block. There were no more books published during his life time.

In his biographies little consideration is given to the relation between Hemingway and BB. Biographer Carlos Baker published 13 letters directed to the art historian in Hemingway's "Selected Letters". In 1990 James Brasch wrote a 20 page long analysis of the correspondence. On the other hand in BB's "Selected Letters", there is no mention of any letter sent to EH. In BB's diary of the years 1947 to 1958, covering the time of the correspondence, there is only one note about Hemingway's prospective visit to "I Tatti" which then failed to materialize. In Ernest Samuel's biography of Berenson little space is given to Hemingway. He is briefly mentioned in only two pages.<sup>6</sup>

This essay concentrates on the difference between the two personalities. It does not provide the full text of Hemingway's letters.<sup>7</sup> Berenson's letters were all handwritten, and are nearly undecipherable due to his impossible handwriting, but also due to the deteriorating material, ink on semi-transparent paper.<sup>8</sup> By chance and good luck Michael Murray Gorman sent me the transcripts he was able to produce.<sup>9</sup> For that I am very grateful.

It is questionable whether Hemingway could follow everything what BB scribbled. He only complained once about the undecipherability. Many of Hemingway's letters were also written by hand, but it is usually easy reading. The digitized letters were kindly made available

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<sup>6</sup> Ernest Samuels, Bernard Berenson, p. 517-518.

<sup>7</sup> There are several published volumes with BB's correspondence with selected partners like Kenneth Clarke, Clotilde Marghieri or Isabelle Steward Gardner.

<sup>8</sup> They are kept in the Kennedy Library in file EHPP-IC02-018.

<sup>9</sup> Letters from Bernard Berenson to Ernest Hemingway 1949-1956 (2015). The transcript with notes was not yet published.

to the author by the Ernest Hemingway Collection in The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library of Boston. For practical reasons the names are abbreviated to EH and BB.

Writing to Berenson became a family affair when Ernest's ex-wife Martha Gellhorn also embarked on an exchange of letters with BB. These are also considered in the following text.





## Getting in touch with Berenson

In autumn 1948 Hemingway and his wife stayed for a longer period of time in Venice. While Ernest was writing and hunting ducks on the island of Torcello, Mary left on November 17, driven by her chauffeur Ricardo in the blue Buick, they had brought from Cuba. She went to Florence to meet Lucy and Alan Moorehead. Alan (1910-1983), Mary, Ernest and Hemingway's third wife Martha Gellhorn had been press correspondents in the Second World War, where they got to know each other. The Moorheads at the time lived in Fiesole near Florence in the 16th century villa „Diana“.

A few days later the two women together with writer J.B. Priestly and painter Lionel Fielding drove over for tea to the neighboring villa „I Tatti“.

Berenson had bought the impressive villa with 40 rooms and with its formal Italian Garden nearly fifty years before. He had become rich not through his books but through his expertise in Renaissance art. He had worked for Joseph Duveen, who in his time was the most important dealer of antique works of art.<sup>10</sup>

Mary had prepared herself for the visit to the eminent art historian. After visiting the Uffizi on November 22 she studied Berenson's opus „Florentine Painters of the Renaissance“, which she had found in the Moorhead's library. When she introduced herself to Berenson, he reacted provocative. He was not at all impressed that he was talking to the wife of a world famous writer. „What number are you?“, he

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<sup>10</sup> He received 25 % on the sales of works of art that he attributed. (Secrest, p. 14) Secrest about Duveen (1869-1939): „A man in the center of a vast corrupt network.“ (p. 361) Samuels: he created a „nexus of corruption“ to sell his paintings. (p. 527-528)

asked insolently, meaning what number of Hemingway's wives. Then he asked how Ernest managed to have so many women.

She answered Hemingway was a man „of tremendous energy and exuberance“. And then came the climax of insolence: “Does he demonstrate those characteristics in bed?” Mary blushed and remained speechless. With that the short conversation ended.

While they had tea in the Limonaia Priestley took over the conversation and talked about the Uffizi while Berenson falling in as usual having the last word.<sup>11</sup> At the end of the visit BB demanded a kiss of Mary. “I gave him what he wanted what I hoped was a generous kiss ... on his eighty-three-year-old lips still full and sensuous“, Mary remembered.

Back in Venice Mary sent a note to Berenson thanking for the hospitality at “I Tatti“ and was astonished to have an answer. Hemingway waited until they were back in Cuba and picked up the thread and wrote his first letter in spring 1949. Mary was a bit jealous: “He edged me out of the correspondence.“<sup>12</sup>

Hemingway was in a creative crisis. He had not published something serious for ten years. And in his personal life he was in a turmoil, having fallen in love with a young Venetian girl, Adriana Ivancich, 30 years younger than him. It jeopardized his marriage with Mary Welsh.<sup>13</sup> He was looking for someone who could inspire him, to whom he could look up to. He choose BB and he idealized him and built him up as his “hero“. James D. Brasch saw BB above all as Hemingway's lost father.

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Welsh Hemingway, *How it was*, p. 229-231.

<sup>12</sup> Mary W.H., *How*, p. 231.

<sup>13</sup> For Adriana Ivancich: Jobst C. Knigge, *Hemingway's Venetian Muse Adriana Ivancich*, Berlin 2012; Andrea di Robilant; *Autumn in Venice*, Milan 3018.

Hemingway grew up with a mother who treated and dressed him for his first years as a girl and with a weak father, who committed suicide. This might explain his macho attitude which resulted from a wish to overplay and compensate for his inner weakness. As a young man he preferred women older than him: Agnes von Kurowsky was seven years older, his first wife Hadley also had been seven years older, his second wife Pauline Pfeiffer four years. Brasch commented that "Hemingway may have found the father he never had".<sup>14</sup> "Perhaps the art critic could understand, or, at least, serve as a surrogate ,father confessor'."

Brasch saw one other reason that EH picked up with Berenson: He was "bored" in Cuba and looked for an intellectual exchange. It is true that EH was not exactly surrounded by artists and academics in Cuba. "He was starved for intellectual companionship in Cuba."<sup>15</sup> Brasch spoke of "his lonely years in Cuba". For company Hemingway had a group of boatmen, fishermen and Spaniards who had been with him during the Spanish Civil War. Hemingway preferred these simple people. Berenson, on his side, had an aristocratic attitude. For him, there was no equality of man. Society was built up in a pyramidal way and everybody should stay in his place.

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<sup>14</sup> James D. Brasch, Christ, I wish I could paint, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 50.



## Hemingway picks up the correspondence

Carlos Baker states that Hemingway “elbowed his way into the correspondence”.<sup>16</sup> Meryl Secrest found “that Hemingway was desperate in his research for Berenson’s favours, and would have prostrated himself for a petal from the Great Man’s boutonniere”.<sup>17</sup>

What did he want from an art historian, a specialist in renaissance paintings, one who hated all modern artists? Hemingway expressed his own attitude to Renaissance Art in a letter to his wife Mary, which he sent to her on November 18, 1948 to Florence, just before she visited Berenson. He said, that he remembered his own visit to Florence together with poet Ezra Pound in 1923: “I’ll bet even you get tired in the Uffizi. That was the gallery that really used to knock me out. I’d think, ,show me one more goddamn Madonna and see how you like it Gentlemen’. “<sup>18</sup>

Baker does not mention this visit to Florence. When he stayed with Pound in Rapallo in 1923 both together with Hadley, took a walking tour through Tuscany, going from Rapallo to Pisa, Siena, Orbetello and from there, by train, back to Lake Garda and Cortina d’Ampezzo.<sup>19</sup>

While in Paris during the 1920s Hemingway befriended Gertrude Stein. In this period he discovered modern painting and met Picasso and Braque. He owned paintings by Braque, Juan Gris, Mirò and Masson. On Gertrude Stein, BB and Hemingway were on common ground. Early in the century Berenson too was in touch with Gertrude and her brother Leo Stein.<sup>20</sup> In vain they tried to make BB appreciate

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<sup>16</sup> Carlos Baker, *Selected Letters*, p. 667.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Schama: *Berenson’s Elixirs*, in: *London Review of Books*, May 1, 1980 p. 6-8. Meryl Secrest: *Being Bernard Berenson*, London 1980.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Welsh Hemingway, *How* p. 229.

<sup>19</sup> Baker, *Hemingway*, p. 107.

<sup>20</sup> Leo Stein later settled in Florence, where he died in 1947.

modern art. The only modern painter BB liked was Matisse.<sup>21</sup> When he saw Peggy Guggenheim's collection in Venice he appreciated Max Ernst, but found him a bit too sexual. Jackson Pollock he considered worthy as "tapestries".<sup>22</sup> He hated Picasso. In May 1953 he went to Rome to see a big Picasso exhibition. He noted: "I do it to get material and detail for the verbal war I am carrying on and will continue against that Satan, that fallen Angel of the arts."<sup>23</sup> On contemporary art he wrote: "I am sure it will pass and leave few if any traces." He speaks of "perverted artists".<sup>24</sup>

In Hemingway's novel "Islands in the Stream" the main character Thomas Hudson is a painter and an Alter Ego of Hemingway himself. The author does not elaborate on Hudson's art, preferring his fishing and wartime activity in the Caribbean.

Brasch headlines his essay about EH and BB with Hemingway's "Christ, I wish I could paint". He writes that Hemingway had a real interest in paintings. He found around 200 books on painting and art in EH's library, including seven books by and about BB.<sup>25</sup> But did Hemingway read these books? There is not much reference to them in his letters. He did not discuss much about paintings with BB. Hemingway was not an analyst. He told anecdotes.

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<sup>21</sup> BB visited Matisse in Nice July 9<sup>th</sup> 1950 (Sunset and Twilight p. 184).

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Samuel, Berenson, p. 521.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Roger Hink, May 14, 1953, Arthur K. McCombe, The Selected Letters of BB, p, 276. In his diary Sunset and Twilight. January 22, 1958, p. 516-517 he wondered how Picasso could be recognized by the critics as one of the superior modern artists. "One wonders what these 'pictures' mean to them." The critics "have to put all sorts of mysterious meanings into them to justify their verbal admiration."

<sup>24</sup> Sunset and Twilight, November 22th 1949, p. 152.

<sup>25</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 50.

**August 25, 1949<sup>26</sup>**

Hemingway sent his first letter from Cuba. He thanked BB for the cordial way he received Mary in Settignano and his „last two books<sup>27</sup> which my wife Mary and I have read with great delight. ... I am not always of the same opinion. But it would be a sad world if we all agreed and could not argue.“ „You are more or less her hero and you are one of the living people that I respect most.“ He said „maybe we might meet sometime“, but adds he was not too keen on Florence and excused himself: “You do not mind a heretic”. He preferred the region around Venice. “I am an old Veneto boy. I love it and know it quite well. A man can lose only one virginity and there his heart would ever be.” Perhaps not in the way Berenson knew the town with all its art treasures. He himself knew it in “a disorderly way”. Mary added in her handwriting, that she enjoyed BB’s book “Aesthetic and History” like her favorite champagne - which was a bit too much a compliment.

**September 4, 1949**

Berenson answered. He addressed EH as “Dear Hemingway”. He was glad, that Hemingway had read him, and said, he remembered an article about Hemingway’s bicycle ride near La Spezia in 1927. The piece had thrilled him and he had said to himself: “This is a coming writer.” He further liked “A Farewell to Arms”. About Mary he commented frivolously: “She is the most sparkling vital hussy I ever have encountered”.<sup>28</sup> Then he urged EH: “Ernest for my sake must

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<sup>26</sup> Selected Letters, p. 666-667. EHPP-OC07-001, typed. BB had stayed in Venice shortly after the Hemingways left (June 17 to June 26, 1950).

<sup>27</sup> One was „Aesthetic and History in the Visual Arts“, New York 1948.

<sup>28</sup> Also in the following letters BB made strange remarks about Mary. Several times he spoke of her as Hemingway’s “bedfellow”. Another time as EH’s “desirable and appetizing conjux” (September 11, 1954).

come to Florence ... for a week of talk.” He had to come soon because BB was in his 85<sup>th</sup> year.

The Hemingways returned to Cuba after Venice and Hemingway tried to finish his novel “Across the River and into the Trees”. He was in a bad mood about the difficulty in writing the story and about being separated from his beloved Adriana. Mary wrote to BB, that the work had pushed her husband “into a vial of seething chemicals, dangerous to meddle with”.<sup>29</sup> But it was more his passion for Adriana. He said to Jose Luis Herrera, who complained about his drinking too much: “I am fed up with Living. I can’t write, I love only Adriana.” And he said he would commit suicide.<sup>30</sup>

From January to March 1950 Hemingway was in Venice for his second visit. A trip to see BB in Florence seemed not to have been on his mind which was completely taken over by his longing for Adriana Ivancich. From the end of October to the beginning of February 1951 Adriana accompanied by her mother visited Hemingway in Cuba.

### **December 26, 1950**

Berenson had waited impatiently for Hemingway’s visit: “Why did you not come to see me when you were so near in Venice, and I expected you. ... I am getting old and feeble, and if you want to see me on earth, do not delay too long. Eagerly. BB”.

### **December 31, 1950<sup>31</sup>**

EH was still formal, addressing BB as “Dear M. Berenson”, and signed the typewritten letter with “Your friend Ernest Hemingway”. He excused himself for not coming to see BB. “I always get in the Veneto

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<sup>29</sup> Baker, Hemingway, p. 478.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Reynolds, Hemingway. The Final Years, p. 233.

<sup>31</sup> EHPP-OC07-013.



and then I can't get out." He was working very hard<sup>32</sup> and Mary had broken her leg while skiing in Cortina. "Please don't do anything spectacular like dying. ... But if you ever should; it would make it easier to do ones self." He promises for the future: "I'll come over if it's possible. But possible is such a moveable feast this year." He asked BB to send him his "Sketch for a Self Portrait". As the book was first published in Italian under the title "Abozzo per un autoritratto", Electa, Firenze 1949, Hemingway wrote that he could read Italian and would translate the text for Mary.<sup>33</sup>

For a year and a half there are no letters. It was the time when he wrote the "Old Man and the Sea". EH sent a copy of the freshly published novel to Settignano with the attached note: "Dear Ber.B. Hope that you are well and this won't bore you. ... Maybe we'll all learn how to write some time. It shouldn't be difficult if there was time enough."<sup>34</sup>

### **September 6, 1952**

BB sent his compliments. "I have read it with boyish zest ... such a dolce stil nuovo you imitate with this gem! I greatly prefer it to the Victor Hugo-esque inflationary magniloquence of Moby Dick, and I like your Old Man ever so much more than I do Ahab." He ended: "When shall we three meet? I am eager for your presence."

### **September 13, 1952 from Cuba<sup>35</sup>**

EH denied that his novel is full of symbols as many critics had said. "There isn't any symbolism. The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish." Then he asked BB to write a small critique of the novel. „Do you think it would be wrong if

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<sup>32</sup> On „Across the River and into the Trees“.

<sup>33</sup> The English-American version came out only in 1952.

<sup>34</sup> James D. Brasch, *The Other Hemingway*, p. 121.

<sup>35</sup> Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, p. 780-781.

I asked you if you wanted, or wished to, or would be pleased to, write 2 or 3 sentences or 1 sentence about this book that could be quoted by Scribners? You are the only critic that I respect and if you really liked the book it would jolt some of the people I do not respect.” In fact Hemingway saw the symbolisms the critics wanted to see in the novel “un truco nuevo de los intellectuals”. “It amused him to keep up his anti-intellectual anti-symbolic prose.”<sup>36</sup>

### **September 27, 1952<sup>37</sup>**

BB sent the few lines, EH had asked for. It was his only machine-written piece in their correspondence:

“An idyll of the sea as sea, as un-Byronic and un-Melvillian as Homer himself, and communicated in prose as calm and compelling as Homer’s verse. No real artist symbolizes or allegorizes – and Hemingway is a real artist – but every real work of art exhales symbols and allegories. So does this short but not small masterpiece.” So Berenson found a compromise in the symbolism-affair, that also pleased the author.

After the flop of the novel “Across the River and into the Trees” Hemingway was keen to finally have a new success. Anxiously he waited for the comments. But to Berenson he presented himself unimpressed. “One does not care about the reviews. I cared about yours. But reading the others is just a vice. It is very destructive to publish a book and then read the reviews. When they do not understand it you get angry; if they do understand it you only read what you already know and it is no good for you. It is not as bad as drinking Strega but it is a little like it.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Baker, Hemingway, p. 506.

<sup>37</sup> Hemingway, Selected Letters, p. 785. EHPP- IC02-018.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Welsh Hemingway, How, p. 307.

## **October 2, 1952<sup>39</sup>**

Perhaps an allusion to his platonic love affair with Adriana Ivancich, Hemingway wrote: "I ought to be in Italy now but I have to try to run my life so that it does not ruin everyone else's life. But this is when I miss Italy the most." With his publisher Scribner he had no inhibitions to confess his love and his torment. But with his venerated BB perhaps he felt ashamed to give away his feelings.<sup>40</sup>

He mentioned BB's new book "Rumor and Reflection" that had just come out in America<sup>41</sup> with excellent reviews. He did not say whether he read the book that was a diary of Berenson's war years from 1941 to 1944. The question is, what should have been Hemingway's interest in BB's complex reflections on art, history and religion?

During the war Berenson had stayed secluded in his villa "I Tatti" and the later part in hiding in the villa of a diplomat near Florence. At the same time Hemingway was in the middle of the fighting in Normandy and in the German Hürtgenwald. (in one of his letters EH told BB about his killing Germans).

The letter finishes with a formula that he used several times. "Please forgive me for writing dull and stupid letters."

## **October 10, 1952**

Berenson expressed doubts about the value of his own works. "What I already have done scarcely gives pleasure." He said he would have liked to write other books like "Man and his World as Works of Art", but was not able. He mentioned his cousin and lawyer Lawrence Berenson, who often took trips to Cuba. "I wonder whether it would

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<sup>39</sup> Hemingway, Selected Letters, p. 784-785. From Cuba.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Scribner 9/10 July 1950, Selected Letters p. 704.

<sup>41</sup> BB ordered his publisher Simon and Schuster to send him a copy, but it may not have arrived in Cuba. (BB Letter September 6, 1952)

amuse you to see him.” Lawrence worked as lawyer for dictator Fulgencio Battista and his government. He was also Berenson’s American lawyer and investment counsellor.

At the end of the letter BB mentioned that Martha Gellhorn was now living in Rome. “I see her once in two or three years.”<sup>42</sup>

**October 14, 1952**<sup>43</sup>

Hemingway answered from Cuba: “Hope that Martha is well and happy. I understand she talks very bitterly about me. But that is quite natural. I would not believe too much of it. I think no one gets a very accurate or credible account from either party to a broken marriage. Certainly I am not giving one. Anyone confusing a handsome and ambitious girl with the Queen of Heaven should be punished as a fool.”

He encouraged BB to continue his work and finish a new book.<sup>44</sup> “Don’t write silly stuff about wasting your life. It was in doing what you had to do that you learned what it is worth while to say now. Writers of fiction are only super-liars who if they know enough and are disciplined can make their lies truer than the truth.”

BB insisted in this period that he had failed in life and had wasted his time. Already in his “Sketch for a Self-Portrait” he said, that he wished to be more than an expert in art. He said he had concentrated too much on the one period of the Renaissance. He had wasted too much time on reading and on travel. He would have liked to be a university teacher, but had no talent in rhetoric.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Obviously he saw her more often. See below.

<sup>43</sup> Selected Letters, p. 788-789,

<sup>44</sup> BB published „Seeing and Knowing“ in 1954.

<sup>45</sup> BB: Sketch for a Self-Portrait, p. 35-55.

## **November 11, 1952**

BB about the success of the "Old Man": "I have never heard of such prayer, praise, litanies and hymns as have been offered up for The Old Man and the Sea. You should be feeling that your horn is exalted."

## **November 26, 1952**

Within two weeks BB followed up with another letter. He said he enjoyed EH's "rambling epistle" and told him of his recent meeting with Martha in Rome. "Martha Gellhorn always speaks with great admiration of you as a writer and as a novelist. Never speaks of your concubinage and married years. Perhaps she regrets them. I fear that she is lonely and from all sorts of occupations as ersatz." Then he asked Hemingway for his opinion about Thomas Wolfe. And about Hemingway himself he said: "All you write about your writing is fascinatingly interesting, and I want more and more and more." As in the other letters he concluded: "I fervently hope to meet you in flesh." And he reminds EH that he is now 87 and a half.

## **December 7, 1952<sup>46</sup>**

Hemingway told BB about the film from his novel "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" ("improbable and dull") and informed him that the journalist Lilian Ross had sent him her book ("Picture") about the making of the movie. Then he turned to Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938) as BB had asked. EH wrote he had met Wolfe at the bar of the Waldorf Astoria in New York together with his editor Max Perkins.<sup>47</sup> „He impressed me as a sort of literary Primo Carnera<sup>48</sup>. ... Tom seemed to have a sort of glandular giantism. He would write 200,000

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<sup>46</sup> EHPP-OC09-007, typewritten.

<sup>47</sup> Wolfe had the same publisher (Scribner's) as Hemingway.

<sup>48</sup> Wolfe measured 1.98 m.; the boxer Carnera 2.05 m.

words of which 30,000 would be good and Max would cut the rest. Tom got sick of that finally. He always believed the whole 200,000 were good just as a man might believe that he produced a coco-nut and he had made it. Max showed me some of the stuff he cut and it was a sort of bloody flux of words . He wrote with all the ease of a man going to the toilet when he has amoebie. ... I read *Look Homeward Angel*<sup>49</sup> and I liked it very much although I was a little let down when I found the great suffering the hero had was getting crabs. ... He had what was necessary to be considered great in America. He was oversize, and he used much rhetoric.”

As in other letters Hemingway came back on BB’s advanced age. “Am always impressed by everything about you except your great age and improbability of immediate demise. Anykind of a good man in Italy lives to be 92 at least. ... You live this winter well and we will celebrate it in the spring.”

### **January 24, 1953<sup>50</sup>**

EH wrote about his longing for Venice that in reality was the longing for Adriana Ivancich. “It is two years now that I have not been there and that is twenty years too long. Today is a gloomy wet day and that makes me more homesick.” He came back on his Venice novel “Across the River” and hoped that BB would not think it “contrived” as the critics thought, “and that there could not be such a human being as the girl Renata”.<sup>51</sup>

As in some other letters Hemingway wrote of writers of his time, people he had met himself. So he gave a deprecating portrait of Sherwood Anderson. He “was a slob. Un-truthful (not just inventing untruthful; all fiction is a form of lying) but untruthful in the way you

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<sup>49</sup> Published with Scribner’s in 1929.

<sup>50</sup> Selected Letters, p. 801-802

<sup>51</sup> Renata was inspired by the figure of Adriana Ivancich.

never could be about a picture. Also he was wet and sort of mushy. ... From the first time I met him I thought he was a sort of retarded character. The sort that gets to be Minister of Culture in a new chicken-shit Republic where there are no standards except charm.” EH said he could also write some funny stories about André Malraux (1901-1976).

### **February 2, 1953**

Berenson picked up Malraux.: “I resent Malraux’s writing about Art, just because it is so fetching, so transporting, but away from Art. And that is what the public loves – to be taken to the brink and prevented from plunging.” Newspapers say that Hemingway will soon return to Italy. “May it come true! ... I fear you may be horrified to discover what a whisper of a man I am, what a survivor of a dim and distant past.”

### **February 17, 1953<sup>52</sup>**

In this period the flow of letters was quite intense. Hemingway was making fun of André Malraux. “Malraux is a jerk of his own invention. Carried on his own image by a shaky hand with a tic in the left eyebrow.” Then EH described the situation around Paris in August 1944, when he by his own description commanded a troupe of French irregulars. Here he met Malraux, whom he knew from the Spanish war. The vain French had been full of medals and decorations. “I had one of two shirts I owned.” Malraux boasted himself that he commandes 2000, while EH had only a dozen.

### **March 6, 1953<sup>53</sup>**

BB had recommended the philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) to Hemingway. BB and Santayana were mates in Harvard

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<sup>52</sup> Selected Letters, p. 803-804. From Cuba

<sup>53</sup> EEH-OC09-011.

University, and BB kept him in high esteem.<sup>54</sup> EH tried to read Santayana, of whom he kept six books in his library. Hemingway's reaction seems to suggest that he did not understand very much of the complex thoughts.

In this letter Hemingway wrote he had read Santayana's book "My Host the World" about his guests and then turned immediately to himself who had been "over-guested". "I have learned to love a guest who brings something beside his unique personality and his powers of criticism", something special from his home area to eat and drink.

In the moment he was hosting a "very beautiful young girl ... who would delight you. She is black german from Gottenburg [Göttingen] (she says) but she looks like Indonesia. ... She is armoured with the blindado egotism of the uneducated. Miss Mary will throw her out of the house shortly I feel sure. But she still likes her around because she is decorative. I wish I could make you a present of her." The girl was the German photographer Inge Schöenthal, later married to Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. She was 23 years old at the time and came with a recommendation of Hemingway's German publisher to take a series of photos of the author. She stayed about a month at the Finca and produced several very intimate photos of Hemingway. The most famous is a photo with Hemingway and herself with a big marlin.<sup>55</sup>

Then he turned again to Santayana. He sounded "awful" in his last book. „How arrogant must a man be to consider himself philosopher. The self proclaimed philosopher and the self proclaimed poet seem stupid. And probably false." After BB's recommendation Hemingway

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<sup>54</sup> Santayana also influenced T.S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein.

<sup>55</sup> see Jobst C. Knigge, Hemingway and the Germans, Hamburg 2018.



had read Santayana. There are several volumes in Hemingway's library.<sup>56</sup>

After Santayana EH returned to André Malraux. The „Condition Humaine“ (1933) “is a fine book“. But he criticised “L’Espoir“ (1937) about the Spanish Civil War where the American and the French writer met. He wrote Malraux did not go to many of the places like the battle of Guadalupe that he had described nor could he talk to the local people because he did not know Spanish. EH added that Malraux's impressions were second hand and it was easy to write about „Man's Hope“ in the comfort of the Cote d'Azur.

He always tried to be funny. “I have decided to give up all other forms of writing and become an homme de lettres [underlined]. Imagine when we are both dead as snake shit and they publish the famous Berenson-Hemingstein letters.“ Like in some other letters EH excused himself for “the dullest letter you have ever received“.

### **March 15, 1953<sup>57</sup>**

BB defended Santayana: he wrote beautifully, and the chief reason for that was that Santayana “never lived“. BB asked: “What is life? Is it exercising to the utmost all, positively all one's animal functions? That seems to be what the likes of you seem to write about, do write about and pretend that IT is LIFE. Then poor ME has not lived at all. I have loved much, but fucked little - although exquisitely and ecstatically as you sip a priceless liqueur.”<sup>58</sup> I have never been drunk and do not like a drink except of wines too expensive for my pocket. I

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<sup>56</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 55-56.

<sup>58</sup> With this expression BB exceptionally lowered himself on Hemingway's verbal niveau. Meryle Secrest does not give a clear picture of Berenson's love life. Apart from his wife Mary, who had an early history of health problems, BB was in relation with many women, but it seems they were mostly platonic. One four years long affair was with Belle Greene, a librarian for art collector J. Pierpont Morgan. She was nearly 20 years younger than him. (Secrest, pp. 290).

have never fought nor bled. In short I have never been a he man. Would you write me down as a muff? Not if you knew me, I hope."

Commenting on the German photographer in Cuba: "Your German-Indonesian beauty warms my cold balls. Can't you send her by air-mail?"

### **March 20-22, 1953**

Hemingway wrote a very chaotic several page long letter from Cuba<sup>59</sup>, in which he mixes all kind of themes, never elaborating on a subject. You wonder what BB should have thought about it. Again he mentioned philosopher Santayana and that he had read a Santayana book, but did not go further.

About beauty: "I cannot write beautifully but I can write with great accuracy (sometimes I hope) and the accuracy makes a sort of beauty." Then Hemingway who has been a alcoholic most of his later life, turns to the theme of being drunk. "I think it is wonderful that you have never been drunk." He writes that he has never been drunk while on duty and in civil life "unless I am very bored." Apart from Brut Champagne he was drinking only inexpensive wines and could not understand why BB spend so much money on high class wines.

BB abhorred drunkards. He wrote in his "Self-Portrait": "The submergence of reason under the threshold of awareness which takes place in gatherings and banquets that end to intoxicate before the participants have drunk much is something I preferred not to submit myself to, and failed to enjoy the event. Needless to add that more distressing still to me was out and out drunkenness. Shall I confess that among the many considerations that led me to prefer Florence and Italy to Boston and America, to London and England, as a residence was the recollection of reeling, whisky-smelling men and

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<sup>59</sup> Selected Letters, p. 808-815.

women, dead drunk with babes in their arms, that one encountered the moment one left the genteel quarters of Anglo-Saxon towns.”<sup>60</sup>

On different places in the letter he mentioned he and BB had different lives. “You see there is the problem of up-bringing. When I was your age, when we both were boys, you had freedom to move around in Europe as you wished and your problems were self imposed. ... When I was the same age the problems were imposed by other people.” Then he mentioned the places of the First World War, where he had been as an eighteen year old. “I loved pictures very much but I looked at them on crutches or with a leg in a cast.”

### **March 29, 1953**

BB thanked for the “ocean-stream-of-sky of a letter”, a “general confession”. “In comparison with yours, my life has been pale and in some ways lonely, loitering, reading, staring, writing, walking, amorizing but rarely playing ‘the beast with two backs’. ... But I have lived a rich and adventurous and colorful life compared with Santayana.” This man never had a friend, never cared for the fate of others, but he was a great writer and thinker. (In fact the philosopher led a “puritan” life<sup>61</sup>, was never married and spent his last ten years in a Roman monastery.) At the end of the letter BB thanked EH for being a bad speller. “I am one too and a worse one.”

### **April 13, 1953**

This Hemingway letter is quite irrelevant and probably without interest for BB. It is about the film-making of “The Old Man and the Sea” with actor Spencer Tracy. He wrote about the weather and the sea, that Gertrude Stein did not like the mountains and Martha

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<sup>60</sup> BB: Sketch, p. 94-95.

<sup>61</sup> In 1935 he published a biographical novel with the title “The Last Puritan”.

Gellhorn did not like the tropical sea and preferred the Mediterranean.

**April 22, 1953<sup>62</sup>**

Hemingway had received the illustrated Phaidon edition of "The Italian Painters of the Renaissance". He had read the book already, but this edition contained plates of the paintings. "They are certainly damned helpful and a great pleasure to have." He announced that he will reread the book. With the plates "it is all new and I have so much to learn".

Hemingway was uneducated and in his relation with BB he showed his interest to improve his culture. Rarely Hemingway mentions BB's Jewishness. He asked him what he thought of the incident in which an Israeli with an iron bar broke the arm of a violonist who played Strauss. He himself was "sick at my stomach". He remembered he had given blood during the Jewish-Arab war 1948/49. "They treated me sort of like an Arab spy. Was I Jewish? No. Then why did I want to give blood? Because I could not go to fight in the war and wished to do something." He finishes again with dying. "Maybe you are lucky to have your life in order and not have to see how this world is getting to be. But even in a bad world it is such a waste to die."

**April 22, 1953**

BB asked Hemingway about Getrude Stein (1874-1946) whom EH befriended in his Paris' years. Stein "the inthinkable clown of sex, race and country." BB called her "bluff, before she got to the stunt performer you all fell for". He said he was preparing three books, one about Lotto, one about Caravaggio and one about 'Seeing and Knowing', that last might interest also EH. Then he asked what

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<sup>62</sup> EHPP-OC09-013, typewritten.

Hemingway was reading and recommends Rosamond Lehmann's "Echoing Grove" that was just published.

**May 4, 1953<sup>63</sup>**

Hemingway wrote that he frequented Gertrude Stein during his Paris years in the 1920ies. He often visited her in her salon 27 Rue de Fleurus. "I liked to look at the pictures which were all new to me."<sup>64</sup> Gertrude had been very ambitious, writing everyday and wished to be published. He had taught her to write dialogues. Gertrude also had been the godmother to his son John. But their friendship had been spoilt by Alice Troklas ("jealous bitch"), as her companion destroyed all her other friendships. Gertrude had become exclusively lesbian with only homosexual friends. She valued people according to be useful to her.



**Gertrude with the little John  
in the Luxembourg Gardens**

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<sup>63</sup> EHPP-OC09-014, handwritten.

<sup>64</sup> Gertrude Stein who came from a rich American family from Pittsburgh had an important collection of paintings of Picasso, Matisse, Cezanne, Braque, Juan Gris. Monet, Gauguin, Renoir, Valloton.

**May 21, 1953**

BB congratulated EH for winning the Pulitzer Prize. He was on a trip to Sicily where he saw an exhibition of the painter Antonello da Messina. "I love knocking about realms where nature and man have combined to produce what pleases my 'eye' and all my other 'nobler' senses." He spoke again positively of Rosamond Lehmann's book ("great achievement of craftsmanship"). Then he wanted information about Martha Gelhorn. "With me she plays a cat-and-mouse-game. She seems for some mysterious reason afraid of approaching me." BB put that in relationship with Martha's attachment to the Gheradesca family. That family had an important link with New York and had snobbed him.

**May 27, 1953<sup>65</sup>**

"You asked me to write you about Miss Martha. So I started dutifully and had a wonderful time writing what you should never write. But then I realized that no one, no matter how truthful they think they are writing, can write truthfully in the round about a personal thing." EH gave a list of problems, most important the difference in interests. She did not have an interest in good books, good paintings and good music. Martha preferred crime stories. Though she knew French well, she only read trivial Colette, because Colette had Henri du Juvenal as lover. And she herself had an affair with the young Bernard du Juvenal. In war she loved to dress in nice uniforms and enjoyed the admiration of generals and other soldiers. During the invasion of France she wanted him to dress up properly „as going to some ballroom". "She probably made more tax free money about our dead and about atrocities than any other female author made since Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin." He hated her ambitions. In

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<sup>65</sup> The letter is classified in the Hemingway Collection. But Brasch, Christ, p. 61 could give quotes. Hemingway said he did not send the letter, but it seems it arrived in Settignano.

all: a bitter washing of dirty linen.<sup>66</sup> He called her “bitch“, she called him “pig“.<sup>67</sup>

### **June 10, 1953<sup>68</sup>**

Hemingway mentioned two letters about Martha, that he allegedly did not send. “The subject was too distasteful“. It is a waste of time to talk about her. He recommends: „Please always be nice to her.“

Then as to seeing BB in Florence he writes: “I have given up ever seeing you along with all other worldly pleasure.” Instead of Italy he is going to Spain, to see the Prado in Madrid again and to Toledo to see the „real and the false Grecos“. And he praises himself: “I can tell the real from the false ones easily as a barometer tells you the atmospheric pressure.“

EH criticised Santayana, so highly esteemed by BB: “No matter how beautiful Santayana wrote I think he was a sort of chicken-shit philosopher. To die un-loving and un-loved except by nuns.“<sup>69</sup>

And about himself he tells BB that the press is writing a lot about him. „My life is a little bit complicated. ... Most of it is my own fault, sometimes too stupid, sometimes the other way round.“ But he is satisfied with his books. Recently he had re-read an old book of his

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<sup>66</sup> It was especially her ambition that Hemingway criticised. To his wife Mary he complained, that Martha had stolen from him stories about the battle of the Hürtgenwald for her war novel „The Wine of Astonishment“, material that he told her, while she had never been at the place, and let her lover General Jim Gavin make corrections to her text. (he told Mary in Venice winter 1948/49, see Michael Reynolds: Hemingway. The Final Years, New York/London 1999, p. 184). In his novel „Across the River and into the Trees“, New York 1950, he wrote clearly meaning Martha: „She had more ambition than Napoleon and about a talent of an average High School Valedictorian.“

<sup>67</sup> Caroline Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 256.

<sup>68</sup> EHPP-OC09-015

<sup>69</sup> EH refers to the fact, that Santayana spent his last years in a Roman monastery cared for by nuns.

republished by Scribner's<sup>70</sup>. "It was a fine book with each word so fresh." He would not have changed hardly anything.

Again: "Excuse dull letters".

### **June 22, 1953**

Hemingway must have sent at least the letter dated May 27, because BB related to the contents. He said Hemingway gave a "convincing portrait" of Martha. It explained BB's own "feelings to (or repelled by) her." He doubts whether he will see her again. "I shall not make another move in her direction." Berenson again questioned his whole life. As to others he lamented that his life had been a failure.<sup>71</sup> "I never can reach bottom in myself, or even approach it." He could study himself but coming "next to nowhere".

Secret comments: "He spilled out his story like a mariner condemned to carry the dead weight of an Albatros, as if seeking absolution."<sup>72</sup> He said he had planned to be a writer, a second Goethe. Being considered as an art expert was not enough for him.

### **August 11, 1953<sup>73</sup>**

The Hemingways were on a ship to Africa after being in Spain and France. He underlined in his letter that he had seen the Prado in Madrid. "The Prado was wonderful and I was very proud of the care the Republic [in the Civil War] had taken of the pictures. Someone should write about that properly some time. Now I have all good pictures again in my head and in my heart, much more secure than if

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<sup>70</sup> He did not say what book.

<sup>71</sup> Rosamond Lehmann: „He told me six times that his life had been a failure.“ (Secret, p. 15.) In his diary January 10, 1952, *Sunset and Twilight*, p. 245 about his self doubts. "I feel anything but self-satisfied. ... I feel sincerely humble before the accomplishments and achievements of others."

<sup>72</sup> Secret, p. 15.

<sup>73</sup> *Selected Letters*, p. 823-824.



they were in my dining room.” “Christ I wish I could paint”, he wrote thinking of Aigues Morts, that he had seen now for the second time. „I was painting that town in my head with the crusaders off loading their baggage and their piss-pots to leave from Le Grau de Roi.“

### **September 3, 1953**

BB had heard that EH was on his way to Africa and had sailed from Genoa. “Was upset you had not come down to inspect and be inspected.” He commented Hemingway’s trip to Spain. “I revel in all phases of its architecture, and I can look at a Velasques for hours and can enjoy the strong gin of Greco. And every landscape!”

### **September 16, 1953<sup>74</sup>**

From his Safari around Tanganyika and Kenya Hemingway wrote about lion hunt and getting up in the early morning. The tenderloin of lions when breaded were like wiener schnitzel, he wrote. EH wished BB could have been there. (Imagine the fine BB with his delicate stomach, instead staying in his well kept garden with every stone and every flower in its place, sleeping rough in a tent, getting up at five o’ clock in the morning and moving between ferocious lions and hyenas!)

### **September 28, 1953**

Berenson wrote from near Treviso where he stayed in the Palladian Villa Barbaro with its Veronese frescos. He said he would soon go to Venice and visit Torcello to inspect the place where Hemingway stayed in winter 1948/49. Commenting on Africa, he envied Hemingway’s “wild joy of living, lion-eating, matutinizing”. He himself had a “poor summer” having to rest more and more.

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<sup>74</sup> EHPP-OC09-017, handwritten.

### **November 15, 1953<sup>75</sup>**

After Tanganyika Hemingway was now in Kenya. He had caught up with his son Patrick (born 1928). After graduating from Harvard University Patrick had moved to Tanganyika to become a big game hunter and later had his own business. "I would like to send him to see you. ... You are his hero as well as mine." He considered his son much more intelligent than himself. In a way "he is too intelligent to be my son." About the impending Nobel prize: "If I ever win the award I would dedicate it to you (who deserves it)." Mary added that she was enjoying "Rumor and Reflection".

### **November 22, 1953**

Berenson reminds EH to come to see him in Settignano when he returned to Venice. He would be "delighted" to personally know Hemingway's son Patrick. He said he published his book about Caravaggio and "Seeing and Knowing". He would give EH copies of both. Hemingway already looked forward to return to Venice. He wrote to Gianfranco Ivancich in December, that he planned to „drive down to see Berenson“. <sup>76</sup>

But while on safari in Eastern Africa Hemingway and his wife had two air-crashes on January 22 and 23, 1954. When BB heard of the accidents he sent a cable with congratulations for the survival.

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<sup>75</sup> EHPP-OC09-017, handwritten.

<sup>76</sup> EHPP-OC09-017

## **The failed visit to BB**

**February 2, 1954<sup>77</sup>**

Hemingway answered from Shimony/Kenya. The letter was quite chaotic and confused due to Hemingway's condition. He announced that he would be back in Venice on March 26 and is planning to drive down to Settignano to see BB. "I want to see my lovely Adriana and I want to make the small pilgrimage to see you." Here he mentions for the first time directly Adriana Ivancich.

Then he spoke about his relationship with BB, between the uneducated and the learned and wise man. He considered him his teacher and master. „In some ways I am your pup from being educated, a little, by you through the books, the god-damnend beautifully worked out lovely books. I was a Bergamo boy before I ever heard your name, and I had not heard it only because I had grievously neglected being brought up properly. But I am sort of your pup. You never have to acknowledge me and can always denounce me with impunity.“

He called BB "my brother and father", "my only existing father" and himself "a really bad repeat bad boy". "You with your lovely achieved age are, in a way, or without any stupid compliments my HERO."

"I have many funny things to tell you and you alone. You only, you who I love. ... You with whom I share a tribal secret."

**March 26, 1954**

Now finally EH announced his coming to Settignano. And BB answered: "I look forward with keen zest to seeing you in flesh." This

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<sup>77</sup> Selected Letters, p. 827-828, EHPP-OC09-018.

BB had said so many times, repeated in nearly every letter. But then followed an excuse: his calendar was very full, and he had no room in the „Tatti“ for him and Mary to stay overnight. “This is the silly season, i.e. the time when all and sundry are here, many of whom I cannot refuse a visit or a meal at I Tatti. I mention this dolorous fact which will prevent my seeing you both alone as much as I should wish. ... I can feed you as often as you and Mary come to grace my board. I can take you to walks, and surely have grand talks.”

Obvious BB was afraid of an encounter in reality. He preferred to continue the virtual world. One day earlier, March 25, 1954, BB explained in his diary: “Ernest Hemingway is impending, and I look forward with a certain dread to seeing and knowing him in flesh. Hitherto we have only corresponded. His letter seemed written when he was not quite sober, rambling and affectionate. I fear he may turn out too animal, too overwhelmingly masculine, too Bohemian. He may expect me to drink and guzzle with him, and write me down as a muff. I know him only through his writing, which I admire greatly here and again, but seldom a whole book. What can he know of the real me? Has he seriously read anything I have written? Has he been taken by the myth? Has his present wife, whom I led through my garden some years ago, given him ideas about me? What, I wonder, does he expect? I dread arranged meetings, I prefer to meet people unexpected, casually, with no responsible feeling that I must see them again, or encounter resentment.”

Brasch sees these lines as a serious rebuke that hurt Hemingway’s feelings and overshadowed their relationship.<sup>78</sup> It seems that BB wanted to discourage the visit. Other persons were lodged at I Tatti in the meantime, like Rosamond Lehmann.

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<sup>78</sup> Brasch, p. 52-53; Secrest p. 378. Baker, Hemingway, p. 523 does not say anything of a rebuke and mentions only that Hemingway waived the visit because of his bad health.

**March 29, 1954<sup>79</sup>**

Hemingway wrote from the Gritti Palace Hotel about his bad health after the accidents in Africa and made a list of all his complaints. He renounced to go to see BB. "I think it is best not to come down. You will live forever I am sure and I will come some time when you don't have so many admirers around. That will probably be never as you will never lack of admirers." His own admirers are "worthless". Mary is fine and perhaps she would come down and make "my pilgrimage for me". Mary could tell him all the funny stories from Africa. But then he decided that they would not visit him at all: "It would make us both too tired. ... I am too shy to come and I hate to go anywhere dans un etat de manifesta inferiorità".

But was it really just bad health? In the same period he was able to travel around the Friuli to see his friends of the local nobility in their country mansions.

**April 3, 1954**

BB picked up Hemingway's not coming to Settignano. "When shall we meet? Nowhere, never?" He excused himself again for not being able to see Hemingway alone. "The social butter is getting so thick and sticky" that he preferred to escape to Venice. But his visit in the Serenissima was planned only for April 25 and would last the whole months of May and June. If Hemingway would be still there he would "enjoy your hyper, super-vitality and the presence of your Mary".

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<sup>79</sup> EHPP-OC9 - 019, handwritten.

### **April 4, 1954<sup>80</sup>**

Again Hemingway spoke about his failed visit to Settignano. He explained that he was too ill in the moment to come. Especially his brain had suffered. He repeated himself and he heard strange things. He also was irritable and he did “not behave as I should”. He could not keep his emotions under control. But if BB needed him, he would come immediately. He envied writer Rosamond Lehmann<sup>81</sup> who was received and lodged by BB in the meantime.

### **April 6, 1954**

Within three days BB sent another letter, regretting this missed meeting with Hemingway. There were now already five letters exchanged within 10 days what shows the sensitivity of the affair. BB said he was “full of fear that I never see you”. With his age he could “vanish away” from one day to the other. He would be in Venice until June 26, and if Hemingway would come back to the town there would be a chance of a meeting,

### **April 9/ May 1, 1954<sup>82</sup>**

In this four page long hand written letter from Gritti Palace Hotel Hemingway continued to be jealous of Rosamond Lehmann for her visit in Settignano. BB admired the attractive Rosamond ever since he had read her novel „Ballad and the Source“. He had invited her to “I Tatti” in 1947 followed by a ten year long letter exchange with frequent visits. Now she stayed a week and BB noted: “I know nobody so life-enhancing.”

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<sup>80</sup> EHPP-OC9 – 019, handwritten from the Gritti Palace Hotel.

<sup>81</sup> Rosamond Lehmann (1901-1990). BB called Rosamond “this marvel of a woman”. “I know nobody so life-enhancing”. (Diary Sunset and Twilight March 12, 1957, p. 472)

<sup>82</sup> EHPP-OC9 – 019.

Hemingway himself in the meantime visited the Veneto and Friuli region, Torcello, Codroipo and Percoto. He spoke of gallows humour. The Germans the Allies hanged in Nuremberg after the war did not have it, that's why they deserved to lose the war. Mary could not joke when things went bad. Marlene Dietrich did have that kind of humour however. He wished that BB could get to know Marlene, the true Marlene not the one she played in the films.<sup>83</sup>

„You must never talk to me about dying. ... You know I love you very much. So just neglect to die.“ He referred to Berenson's constant awareness of death and its threat. At the end Hemingway announced he would leave from Genoa May 6.

The failed visit to Settignano was a humiliation for Hemingway. There was a constant stream of visitors to I Tatti and even to his other country house at Vallombroso. BB needed to be in contact. He once said: “I should feel neglected and forgotten if I really was left alone.”<sup>84</sup> There were writers, art historians, museum directors, curators, artists. Sinclair Lewis paid several visits while staying in Florence. Other people had the privilege to be invited like English writer Rosamond Lehmann. There were John Steinbeck, Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicholson, Somerset Maugham, Mary McCarthy, Freya Stark, painters like Marc Chagall, Renato Guttuso, violonist Yehudi Menuhin, film director Alfred Hitchcock, hobby archaeologist King Gustav Adolf VI of Sweden, art collector Jean Paul Getty, politicians like Harry S. Truman and even ornamental society people like Jacqueline Bouvier, later wife of John F. Kennedy<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup><sup>83</sup> Also Lewis had a bad reputation „of hard drinking and slovenly ways“. But BB found him at the end „presentable“. (Sunset and Twilight, January 19, 1949 p. 116. Ernest Samuel, Bernard Berenson, p. 519)

<sup>84</sup> Sunset and Twilight, p. XVIII.

<sup>85</sup> Jacqueline bothered him afterwards with a series of letters.

When Berenson bought “I Tatti” at the beginning of the 20th century, he had in mind to receive guests and visitors, as the house was much too big for himself and his wife alone. It became like a court with himself as the prince in the middle. Secrest speaks of a „courtlike atmosphere“ in the Villa. He was „the gentleman-scholar who called more princesses by their first name than any other man in Europe.“<sup>86</sup>

Near his “I Tatti” he kept an own guesthouse, Il Villino, for the visitors that stayed over night. “His desire for new acquaintances grew with the years“, stated Ernest Samuel.<sup>87</sup> Robert Cumming wrote about a “insatiable desire for friendship”. But poor Ernest was not among the happy few, welcomed in BB’s inner circle.

Brasch: “The letter from Berenson had clearly offended Hemingway, and they never managed to regain their former intimacy.“ „Berenson’s lack of compassion and understanding for his injured friend, ... was no doubt caused by the self-doubt and recrimination which Berenson suffered throughout most of his later life.“<sup>88</sup> But more probable, BB. was afraid of Hemingway’s reality. Also Secrest: „Berenson ignored the transparently hurt feelings.“<sup>89</sup> He did not have the deep feelings for EH, that Hemingway had for him.

One can imagine that a personal meeting might have been a disaster for both of them. Berenson in „I Tatti“ was the head of a very restricted and exclusive court. Would have Hemingway fit in this circle of “unsereins“, as BB called it? BB would have taken the conversation on a high ground as usual and what would Hemingway have said?

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<sup>86</sup> Secrest, p. 308.

<sup>87</sup> Ernest Samuel, Bernard Berenson, p. 513.

<sup>88</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 53.

<sup>89</sup> Secrest, p. 379.



His stay in Venice in 1954 was the last chance for Hemingway to see his “Hero” in person. Berenson’s excuses together with Adriana and his friends from the Venetian and Friaul nobility kept him away from Florence.<sup>90</sup> BB and EH missed a meeting in Venice for a few days.

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<sup>90</sup> See Jobst C. Knigge: Hemingway and the Venetian Nobility, Berlin 2014.

## **The last period**

Summer 1954 BB came near to death, when he fell down a steep ravine.<sup>91</sup> For several months he stayed in bed with bruises and back injuries. He was nearly 90 years old.

### **August 29, 1954<sup>92</sup>**

Hemingway wrote a short note from Cuba to stay in touch. He was still in bad health. "I had things a little rough for a while and felt terrible not to see you. But next year I hope." He was writing shortstories, but there were too many people in Cuba to bother him. Too much publicity through aircraft crashes.

### **September 11, 1954**

BB wrote he was happy that Hemingway was writing. "I look forward to reading you, you are a thousand times more stimulating than all your ... adulators put together." And continued: "How pitiful what we do compared with what we want to do. At least that is my experience, and despite your great creative power and your enormous energy endowed with nerve, I doubt whether you too are ever happy over what you have just done."

### **September 24, 1954<sup>93</sup>**

This was one of the more interesting letters. Hemingway explained something about his writing. „You are very right about how we never achieve what we set out to do.“ But one should not be too pessimistic, as BB had said. „We do make it come off sometimes as

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<sup>91</sup> Nicky Mariano, *Forty Years*, p. 285, *Secrets*, p. 392., also McCombe, *Selected Letters*, p. XIII speaks of him as a „Prince in a court“.

<sup>92</sup> EHPP-OC10 – 003, handwritten.

<sup>93</sup> *Selected Letters*, p. 836-838. Dictated to his secretary. EHPP- OC10-003

we know when we re-read it after a long time. It always reads to me, then, when it's good as though I must have stolen it from somebody else and then I think and remember that nobody else knew about it and that it never really happened and so I must have invented it and I feel very happy. One always has the illusion about the last thing that has been written and so I have an exaggerated confidence in the Old Man book. Each day I wrote I marveled at how wonderfully it was going and I hoped that on the next day I would be able to invent truly as I had done before."

But Hemingway was not writing to a fellow novel writer, but to an art historian. Fiction „is possibly the roughest trade of all writing. You do not have the reference. ... You have the sheet of white paper, the pencil, and the obligation to invent truer than things can be true.“ It meant the ability to seize the impalpable and make it seem normal.<sup>94</sup>

As in some other letters he came back to the age difference between him and BB. Now he referred to the aircrashes which he survived with heavy injuries. "You must forgive me for presuming that we are the same age but I had the experience of the destruction of vital organs which ordinarily would take a long time to achieve. Also the indelicacies that accompany these destructions and our life expectancy is more or less the same." Hemingway was be right: He survived BB by only two years.

He said he was not able to work at full capacity at the moment due to the tropic weather. He wrote that he always had the aircondition switched on. The atmosphere was not right, "as to write in a pressurized cabin of an airplane".

**October 17, 1954** (date not very clear)

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<sup>94</sup> Baker, Hemingway, p. 525-525.

Berenson wrote: "I seldom have received a more interesting letter. Happily it confirms what I keep saying about the creative artist in any field."

### **October 1954**

EH received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Modestly he declared in a press conference that Carl Sandburg, Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen) and Bernard Berenson would have been better recipients. He said to Harvey Breit: "As a Nobel winner I cannot but regret that it was never given to Mark Twain, nor to Henry James, speaking only of my own countrymen. Greater writers than these also did not receive the prize. I would have been happy, - happier - today if the prize had gone to that beautiful writer Isak Dinesen, to Bernard Berenson, who has devoted a lifetime to the most lucid and best writing on painting that has been produced, and to Carl Sandburg."<sup>95</sup>

### **December 29, 1954**

In a short note BB wished to see the Hemingways in the following years and praises EH's work and humour.

### **June 26, 1955**

It is not clear what happened between 1954/55 that interrupted the exchange for so long. EH started to write two letters to BB for his 90th birthday but then did not send them.<sup>96</sup>

### **September 18, 1955<sup>97</sup>**

In this letter Hemingway explained, why he did not send the letters: „They were no good and I did not send them. The trouble was, I

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<sup>95</sup> Baker, Hemingway, p. 527.

<sup>96</sup> There is one beginning of a letter written in Key West on July 9, 1955 for the 90th birthday. He says the magazines are full with articles about BB. The few lines are on a paper sent more than a year later from Escorial/Spain dated 4 October 1956 (EHPP-OC10 – 018)

<sup>97</sup> EHPP-OC10-012, handwritten.

think, that I was envious that you had lived so long and had a chance to do your work so well. We all have a chance to work well but few to be as old and wise and love things as you do. Then the letters were too loving to someone that you've never seen."<sup>98</sup>

He thanked him „for the beautiful bibliografia“, that BB had sent him. It was a bibliography of Berensons works.<sup>99</sup> Of what use could that book have been for him? At least he found out, that BB had written several articles for the „Corriere della Sera“ and he asked BB whether he also should write articles for the Milan newspaper. But he gives himself the answer: “The problem is that I have so little time left to work and the writing for them, sometimes, would be a pleasure but it is wastage. I would rather write a letter to you.”<sup>100</sup>

Anyway he could not write in Italian like Berenson. He explained that he tried to write large and clear for BB. He did not use his new typewriter, because he hates it. In his old typewriter there was page 594 of the novel that he worked on and he did not want to take the page out.<sup>101</sup>

### **September 29, 1955**

With an interruption of nine months BB answered, this time from Venice. “If only you and Mary were here what a time we would have, not at ‘Harry’s bar’, nor over at Torcello<sup>102</sup>, but here in this apartment.” He said he had met Mary McCarthy, who was writing a book about Venice, “one of those silly pages of distant anecdotes”. BB said he preferred Hemingway’s letters in his handwriting, easy to

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<sup>98</sup> Selected Letters, p. 846, Letter EH to BB September 18, 1955 It seems that EH guessed that he did not have much time left and would not live long. He died with 61, BB with 94.

<sup>99</sup> William Mostyn: Bibliografia di Bernard Berenson, Milan 1955.

<sup>100</sup> Selected Letters, p. 847.

<sup>101</sup> It was a novel about Africa.

<sup>102</sup> Hemingway’s usual haunts. BB stayed in the Hotel Europa and Britannia on the Canale Grande just opposite the Salute Church.

read. He himself detested the typewriter. "That is an instrument that I ignore because a creation of the mechanical age." (BB did not even use the phone already since the 1920s.)

### **October 4, 1955<sup>103</sup>**

Hemingway started again with his standard line, that he does not want to bore BB. He thought he might amuse BB with a „funny letter“. In fact he always tried to be funny for BB. He had a kind of an inferiority complex in comparison with BB. He flattered him: "It has been very nice to know you because you are so articulate that you can put it pretty well in writing. ... It is a little bad luck to love so many things and not to be articulate. You had the luck with the articulate and I had the lovely luck with dialogue."<sup>104</sup>

He admired BB's library (that he had never seen) and complained that his own had been "looted and pilfered". People borrow books but did not bring them back, especially the best, because he had recommended them.

Then he jumped to Santayana whom he had re-read after BB insisted. He wished he had known him. He had known James Joyce<sup>105</sup>, beside him "I never knew a good writer". He mentioned Thomas Mann and praised the "Buddenbrooks": "Maybe as good a book as anyone has written." And to be funny he wrote that Mann in writing "Joseph and his Brothers" was "rewriting the New and the Old Testament".

He mentioned that he owned a painting of Mirò ("La Ferme"), and that he could tell original from false, because he had a built in „shit detector“. In this context he mentioned art dealer Joseph Duveen. He

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<sup>103</sup> EHPP-OC10 – 012.

<sup>104</sup> He thought he was best in writing dialogue, as he said he had taught Gertrude Stein to write dialogue.

<sup>105</sup> BB noted in his diary on August 26, 1950, Sunset and Twilight p. 71: "Could not tolerate the late Joyce."

did not elaborate that BB had worked for Duveen as an expert and had also compromised himself in this way with it.

### **October 19, 1955**

BB wrote: "I ... nearly jumped out of my skin when I read that you, poor Nobel, author of masterpieces as a writer, complained of being unarticulate and envying my being articulate." James Joyce he did not admire very much apart from *Young Man as Artist* and to a less degree *Dubliners*. "Think of our age when he and Getrude Stein count as creators of contemporary literature, from whose influence nobody could escape. In the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century few escaped the Black Death."

### **October 24, 1955<sup>106</sup>**

BB had been ill in the meantime and EH urged him to get well again. He had just received BB's letter written by hand and much of it „illegible even to a cryptographer“. EH wrote that he had few correspondents left, among them Ezra Pound, „who is often a fool and who can so disgust me sometimes with his antisemitism and childish fascism that I cannot write to him.“<sup>107</sup>

He told BB of his work on his new African book. „Am passed 650 pages typed on the book. Am trying to write now like a good sorcerer's apprentice.“ He did not say anything about the contents. It was about his recent African safari, posthumously published as „*African Journal*“. He said he sometimes imitates Faulkner "just to show him how it should be".

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<sup>106</sup> Selected Letters, p. 847-848, machine written from Cuba.

<sup>107</sup> Hemingway had a split relationship with Jews. In his novel „*The Sun also Rises*“, he gives a negative image of the main character Robert Cohn. His third wife Martha Gellhorn had a Jewish mother and a Jewish father. BB was born in Lithuania of Jewish origin. But he tried to distance himself from his Jewishness. He said of himself „I even tried to pretend to what I was not.“ (Secrets, p. 358)

It was early morning when he wrote to BB and it reminded him of the hours when he visited the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, “trying to learn on my education“. But what he really learned was to observe “how hawks fly“.

### **December 21, 1955**

BB was happy that EH was writing again. “We ink-pots are never happy except when we are emptying them. If I only had wings I’d fly to you to enjoy your friendship”.

About Christmas 1955 BB got serious ill. It was the coldest winter in years. Doctors feared for his life. For weeks he had to take antibiotics.

### **July 3, 1956**

Hemingway explained to Harvey Breit how much he appreciated BB: „The only writers I ever liked, really, were Dos<sup>108</sup> when he was still straight in early days, Scott<sup>109</sup> when he was sober..., Sholem Asch<sup>110</sup>, old Berenson in letters, dear good, kind crazy Ezra, Archie MacLeish<sup>111</sup> when he would be funny...“. <sup>112</sup>

### **August 2, 1956<sup>113</sup>**

Hemingway wrote about his work on a “long African book“. He complained he had difficulties to write with always people around. “I am tired of fools“. He interrupted the book at page 850. In the meantime he wrote short stories, “for discipline“. He had written

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<sup>108</sup> John Dos Passos (1896-1970).

<sup>109</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940).

<sup>110</sup> Scholem Asch (1880-1957), Polish-Jewish novelist and dramatist, writing mostly in Jiddish.

<sup>111</sup> Archibald MacLeish (1892-1982), American poet and writer, friend of Hemingway in his Paris’ years.

<sup>112</sup> Selected Letters, p. 862.

<sup>113</sup> EHPP-OC10 – 017, handwritten, the writing turns more and more reclined down from the left to the right.



four stories and was at the fifth. If they would not be good they would not be published. "This is the thing about painters, at least in my time, they sell their failures, their preliminary projects, their plans, their bad ideas, anything we would not publish they sell. Picasso is a good friend of mine, but he would sign and sell his laundry list or used condoms if there was a buyer."

He was preoccupied about Mary's health. She suffered from anaemia and the low red blood cell count made her tired. He thought of taking her to Europe for a climate change. Perhaps they had been too long in the tropics. When in Europe, it would be nice to see BB, but he immediately restricts: "But we will stay only for a few minutes, so we don't tire or bother you. You have to put up with too many bloody people."<sup>114</sup>

At the end he excused himself for the letter. "Classify this letter as a used laundry list type."

### **August 8, 1956**

BB thought of Mary's anaemia. They should come back to Italy and see him. "People like you both do not tire me." Mary McCarthy like Malraux had now "turned to 'Art'". "I wish both could stick to their last. She is a fascinating wench, alarmingly up to date, and ever so brilliant." For a long time he did not hear from Martha Gellhorn. "I wonder how long she will stand the pot-aut-feu domesticity of her present marriage."

This was BB's last letter to Hemingway. Old age took its toll. His eyesight and his hearing were impaired. His handwriting became

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<sup>114</sup> In fact Berenson sometimes hated the many visitors. On May 13, 1952 he wrote in his diary "Twilight and Sunset", p. 262: "I am really bored, annoyed, vexed to have become a showpiece as it were under a glass case, and my house a museum."

indecipherable, and he started to dictate his letters. Hemingway continued to write for another year.

### **August 19, 1956<sup>115</sup>**

Hemingway was negative about Mary McCarthy and her just published book “Venice Observed” (“rewriting a guidebook”).<sup>116</sup> He said he did not hear from Martha until Alan Moorehead had visited him in Cuba. She was now “a London hostess”. “She always knew quite a few shady characters. ... I am glad that she is married to a man who has money and who I’ve heard is extremely nice.” “She was a very ambitious girl and very competitive. She made a fool of me.”

He said he might come back to Italy, but he was waiting “for a situation in the Veneto branch of the family to clear”. [His relation with Adriana Ivancich was more or less over. The letter exchange finished. He only kept his friendship with her brother Gianfranco.]

### **October 4, 1956<sup>117</sup>**

Hemingway said he had loved to see his old places on Spain again. He felt he was already dead and gone to heaven. He came back on Martha. When they were splitting up Martha said: “We were giants and could have had the world at our feet.” He replied that he did not want to have anything under his feet. With Martha’s ambition he “might have become some horrid character like Victor Hugo.” He had no sympathy for Martha the “giant of Beautiful Letters” nor for Mary McCarthy “the heartless girl, now fornicating art as Malraux<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> EHPP-OC10 – 017, sent from Paris.

<sup>116</sup> BB had met Mary McCarthy 1955 in Venice. 1956 she visited him in I Tatti.

<sup>117</sup> Baker, Hemingway, p. 535. EHPP-OC10 – 018, sent from Escorial/Spain.

<sup>118</sup> BB compared Malraux’s “breadth of interest in art” with his own “confined to a couple of centuries of Italian painting. As a matter of fact, my curiosity has led me further afield than Malraux. What has been found dating from the earliest period of the art of today, I am acquainted with. I have never wanted to write except of what I knew as much of as at present can be known.” (Twilight and Sunset, August 11, 1957, p. 494).,

masturbates it so inexpertly and with such solemnity“. Both women could „hang from the same tree upside down“. And he turned to BB: “You have an enviable tolerance of bitches.”

Now film actress Ava Gardner was his neighbor in Spain. He loved his wife Mary but “at the same time all men are a little canaille and I love 2 other girls ... they do cut your heart up sometimes and quite badly.” He still suffered from the separation from Adriana Ivancich. It is not clear who the second girl was.

**April 30, 1957**<sup>119</sup>

It took half a year that Hemingway wrote again.

He complained about recent changes in Cuba, the building of skyscrapers along the beaches and a four lane highway near his finca. “The charm and niceness“ is gone. The old town of Havanna started to look like a “combination of Barcelona and Caracas“. The beaches were used for cement for skyscrapers. The highway near his house was like the road from Mestre to Milano.<sup>120</sup> He mentioned the many deaths among his friends what made it easier to leave the world oneself. As he did not have news from BB he said: “You don’t have to write if it is a bother. I will write again.” Mary wrote about the depressed state of her husband: “The protagonist is his poor long suffering liver.”<sup>121</sup>

**24 August 1957**<sup>122</sup>.

Hemingway’s last letter to BB was a very short note about the filming of „The Old Man and the Sea“. He was occasionally seeing a cousin of

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<sup>119</sup> EHPP-OC10-021, handwritten.

<sup>120</sup> Hemingway remained another two years in Cuba before leaving for good and settling in autumn 1959 in Sun Valley, Idaho.

<sup>121</sup> Baker, Hemingway, p. 537.

<sup>122</sup> EHPP-OC10-024.

BB who gave him the news from Settignano. He called him Richard Berenson, but it seems he was Lawrence Berenson.

Bernard Berenson died November 6, 1959

Ernest Hemingway killed himself July 2, 1961

## **Martha Gellhorn and Bernard Berenson**

Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998), third wife of Ernest Hemingway, entered into Berenson's life about the same time as Mary and Ernest Hemingway. She was then 41 years old. She was the daughter of a German born Jewish gynaecologist from St. Louis. Her socially very engaged mother was a schoolmate of Eleanor Roosevelt.

As correspondent in the Spanish Civil War Martha met Ernest Hemingway and they became lovers. They married in 1940. But there was a lot of rivalry among both and they divorced five years later. She rejected the idea of being just a „footnote“ to her husband and live in his shadow. She fought for being valued on her own merits.



**Martha Gellhorn (Hemingway Collection)**

Martha had several love affairs among others with US-General James M. Gavin, journalist William Walton and physician David Gurevitch. 1954 she married for the second time, former „Time“ managing director Tom Matthews. Apart from her work as war correspondent

she published short stories and several novels. Restlessly she moved around from Washington to Cuernavaca/Mexico, to Rome, London, Kenia and back to London.

At the end of the 1940s Martha lived in Cuernavaca. When she looked for a child to adopt, she chose Italy, where she had been war reporter and had written about the situation of Italian war orphans. Looking for a child in several orphanages in 1949 she arrived near Florence. Her choice eventually fell on „Sandy“ in a home in the town of Pistoia.

Like Mary Martha found her way to Berenson through Lucy und Allan Moorehead. Allan, Mary, Ernest and Martha had been correspondents in the last war and knew each other. The contact was established in about the same time as Ernest wrote his first letter to BB. Already in November 1939 Martha had a first meeting with a nephew of Berenson. She was on a ship to Europe to report on the Finnish-Russian War. The only passenger with whom she could talk during the passage was a Berenson.<sup>123</sup>

Back to Cuernavaca from the meeting in Settignano Martha started a correspondence, like Mary had done. Altogether she sent 72 letters to BB.<sup>124</sup> In the present essay Martha was mentioned already at several occasions in the correspondence of EH and BB. Berenson had been keen to have more information about Martha from her former husband. He said she was playing a cat-and-mouse-game of attraction and rejection with him. But Hemingway remained hesitant. Only in May 1953 Hemingway gave more, mostly negative details. BB found the description “convincing”.

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<sup>123</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 162.

<sup>124</sup> See BB letters to Hemingway (Michael Murray Gorman) footnote to Letter June 22, 1953.

In her first letter Martha said she hoped to “detect wisdom, a steady cool light of knowledge” in BB.<sup>125</sup> Berenson instead asked her “what males she lived with”. She replied that there were no man in Mexico “apart from old gentlemen and fairies, and of course the Indians”, but not being a “D-H. Lawrence lady”, she regarded them with interest and admiration but no lust. When she had time, she sat naked in her walled garden in the sun.<sup>126</sup> After separating from journalist William Walton in Washington she lived alone.

**May 1950** from Cuernavaca<sup>127</sup>

There was no submissiveness and adoration like in EH’s letters. “If I trusted you, which I don’t (and what claim would I have on your trustworthiness) it would be pleasant to write you enormous selfrevealing documents; on the other hand, I know that selfrevealing trick and see it for what it is, the most appalling lying in flirtatious salesmanship. So I’ve kind of given it up, and besides it is doubly because one lies to oneself in the process. As for you I have a big curiosity about you but I know I will never learn anything. You are too fabriqué, too perfectly handtooled, and unlike most, you must be a man who knows his own secrets and therefore will certainly not tell them. So I guess that’s how we’ll stay with the curiosity hanging. But I feel surprised that you should decide, from one letter – written in temper, boredom, dispair – that this is the wrong place for me, that I am an ‘American updater’ (hideous invention, that word), and that I should pull for the shore. What shore do you suggest?”

Berenson told her that the only other person that attacked him like that was Gertrude Stein.

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<sup>125</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 298.

<sup>126</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 282. D.H. Lawrence had lived in Mexico and had written the novel „The Feathered Snake“.

<sup>127</sup> Moorehead, The Letters, p. 218.

In July 1952 she settled near Rome. Through her friend Flavia della Gheradesca she found a place in a big farmhouse called „Olgiata“ in La Storta.<sup>128</sup>

**July 17, 1952** from Olgiata to William Walton:

“I see more of Mr. Berenson than seems to me reasonable; he claims that I treat him like a pickpocket (sic) and I have an awful feeling that I storing him up for future use, in a story, though I do not yet see how or when.” There were possible meetings while Berenson’s visits in Rome (October/November 1952, June/July and November 1953). He mostly stayed in the Hotel Eden, Via Ludovisi.

**December (without date) 1952** from Olgiata to Hortense Flexner:

„Oh Berenson. I don’t like him, you see. I think he is an inexcusable sort of failure. He has a learned mind but it does not seem a mind to me; I never heard him on painting and he may be extraordinary but you know I doubt it. I doubt if he can be really profoundly extraordinary about arts, unless one has a certain fire and richness inside he hasn’t; he is a little Tanagra man<sup>129</sup>, spoilt all his life by smart second rate people. He’s not interesting nor inspiring; I always feel less of a human being after seeing him. Did I tell you that he said to me that no one had so attacked him in his life, except Gertrude Stein.<sup>130</sup> ... Anyhow now he’s gone and forgotten and I do not plan to see him again.“

In summer 1953 she deposited Sandy with his nanny in a children’s chalet in Cortina and went alone for six weeks to Dalmatia.

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<sup>128</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 295-296. The Gheradesca were one of the oldest aristocratic families of Pisa and Florence. Count Giuseppe della Gheradesca was mayor of Florence in the times of Mussolini. He was guest at “I Tatti”.

<sup>129</sup> Tanagra figure, antique female terracotta statue.

<sup>130</sup> Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo spent the summer of 1902 in Florence, when they met Berenson



**July 27, 1953**<sup>131</sup>

Martha wrote from Dubrovnik. She said she was happy for the beauty of the place. "I have recovered the power of seeing and hearing, which I thought were gone for good, worn away by boredom and the kitchen of life and contempt for most of what I heard and saw. This is all such happiness to me that I can hardly believe it; and my only anxiety is the thought of returning. ... Travelling is the final joy of living, I think; the delight of surprise, the delight of glimpses into lives, the lightness and freedom." She wrote she just met her last love David Gurewitsch.<sup>132</sup> "He is the one man I was ever in love with. ... I have not seen him for a year and seven months, when I broke off what was planned to be marriage; and I could not marry him (or anyone probably), but I never got over the feeling of loss. Not the loss of marrying, but the loss of the way of feeling; and it had ended sadly, bitterly, and that was terrible to bear. So when we met it was as if we had been separated for a few hours; it was pure joy and magic; and I fled, knowing I could not again start a life of loving someone at a distance and knowing I could never share his New York existence."

Now she was in peace with herself. But not with Ernest Hemingway. "The sorrow of my life was the way Ernest shut all the doors to the past, made it hateful for me, would leave me no chance to keep the good memories; and I was afraid it was a sort of doom I carried round – a sort of forced emotional amnesia."

**August 9, 1953** again from Dubrovnik<sup>133</sup>

She had just received an appreciating letter from BB. "I am sure you are right and I ought to give Rome la ville another try and perhaps

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<sup>131</sup> Moorehead, Letters, p. 240-241.

<sup>132</sup> David Gurewitsch (1902-1974) was the personal physician of Eleanor Roosevelt.

<sup>133</sup> Moorehead, Letter, p. 242.

will. But from a sense of duty not a sense of joy.“ She did not like the Italians, she did not like the Romans. She did not meet the right man. “Why are there no men, BB? Can you tell me that? Why in heaven’s name can’t they make them alive enough and brave enough and funny enough and good enough to use up a woman’s life?”

While Martha lived in Rome, BB sometimes came to town. Once he invited Martha in his Hotel. “At a given moment, he’d sit next to me on the sofa and I’d say, „Nothing doing. Keep your little hands to yourself.“<sup>134</sup> Moorehead commented the scene: Berenson had developed an „odd sort of preying passion for her“.<sup>135</sup> 1945 Berenson had written in his „Self-Portrait“: „I am aware old men like to fondle young women.“ But he added that he hoped that he avoided such advances.<sup>136</sup>

Secrest: „The fact is that BB was a flirt, an elderly one to be sure, and one who thought of himself as an indulgent father and grandfather only, but in whom women might correctly discern the unmistakable outlines of a seducer.“<sup>137</sup> „BB seemed unable to realize that his younger women friends, and there were many, loved him for his mind and not for the frail, aged shell he inhabited.“<sup>138</sup>

In summer 1956 Berenson wrote: „Were I still potent, I could bed with many, and think the better of them.“<sup>139</sup> Meryle Secrest wrote about BB’s meeting with writer Frances Francis: „He was, she noted, a joyful satyr, who seemed, even at the exalted age of eighty, to be

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<sup>134</sup> Secrest, 1979, p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 298.

<sup>136</sup> BB: Self-Portrait, p. 123.

<sup>137</sup> Secrest, S. 11.

<sup>138</sup> Secrest, p. 12. BB in his diary May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1951, *Sunset and Twilight*, p. 220: He prefers women over 40. “I enjoy flirting with them, stirring the remains of sex in them.”

<sup>139</sup> *Sunset and Twilight*, May 3, 1956, p. 433.

appraising her sensually. He said that if only they'd met when he was young he would have made love to her day and night."<sup>140</sup>

**September 17, 1953** from Rome<sup>141</sup>

Martha had just received a letter in which BB spoke of her story-book "The Honeyed Peace". "I am grateful for your letter and your reassurance, and I need it."<sup>142</sup> "I only write because I have to, and don't have to steadily; but life frays and falls apart and the only way I can make it seem real to me is to write. ... And of course I have very little success."

Actually the reviews were not convincing. It was the only book that she published during her correspondence with BB. She continued: „I think I know absolutely nothing about men, having spent my whole life with them, living their lives, doing their kind of work, ... I am astride the sexes, having the mind (and tastes and instincts) of neither a man or a woman but a scrambled mixture of both; well under those circumstances it isn't odd, is it, that I find it rather difficult ever to get settled in life?" She was always restless and moved from place to place.

After this letter she left Rome and settled in England, where she lived with Thomas S. Matthews<sup>143</sup>, whom she married a year later.

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<sup>140</sup> Secrest, p. 390-391. BB thought himself irresistible. In his diary December 5, 1950 he wrote about unmarried women: "In my presence when accidentally close I feel them vibrating with desire. ... They cling, they make every excuse for keeping close. For lingering. If I give them out of charity a kiss, they tremble, and seem ready to throw themselves on my bosom." (Sunset and Twilight, p. 200).

<sup>141</sup> Moorehead, Letters, p. 242-245.

<sup>142</sup> The book found several negative reviews. (Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 305-306)

<sup>143</sup> Thomas S. Matthews (1901-1991), American journalist and author, editor of Time magazine 1949-1952.

**February 4, 1954**<sup>144</sup>

She wrote about her life with Matthews. She told BB married life was “vastly enjoyable, pea-brained, like going to boarding school for the first time and sitting up all night talking to one’s roommate, and at the same time living in a ,kind of half merry, half haunted ways and means committee.” “It turns out that wedlock is the easiest thing I have so far undertaken.”

**April 26, 1954**<sup>145</sup>

The letter was again about Ernest, his „sneering tone“, mean pomposity, and marked vulgarity.

**May 30, 1954**<sup>146</sup>

“I am, as the London servants say, very well suited. Oh very well suited, in deed. Miraculously so, and I never imagined I could be.”

**January 6, 1955**<sup>147</sup>

She had settled with Matthews and Sandy down in a new house in Belgravia. But she remained restless. “The interesting question is, can one work and be happy?” With Matthews she reluctantly participated in the London society life. She wrote to Berenson about a lunch at the „Ritz“ for Harold Acton<sup>148</sup> given by George Weidenfeld<sup>149</sup>: “George is a man who is so eaten and ravaged by something, the virus of getting ahead (where to?) that he has lost the ability to look at the person he is talking to.” Acton was courteous and kind and gave her a little faith in social life. Rosamond Lehmann,

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<sup>144</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 310.

<sup>145</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 257.

<sup>146</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 310-311.

<sup>147</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 313-315.

<sup>148</sup> Harold Acton (1904-1994), British writer, scholar and aesthete.

<sup>149</sup> George Weidenfeld (1919-2016), Vienna born journalist and publisher (Weidenfeld & Nicolson).

who came for a drink, was so boring that she was shocked into wanting to write again.

**May 18, 1955**<sup>150</sup>

BB noted wondering in his diary about Martha being so absorbed with her child. Without naming her he wrote: "A woman of say forty five, still handsome, still full of sex appeal, herself amorous and enterprising, writes well and publishes, has had every kind of self-enhancing experience as newspaper correspondent and in encounter with events, confesses that now the center of her life is not a new husband, not her career, not adventure, but a little boy she has adopted. The maternal instinct and to exercise it to the full, is what the average woman is after, and that alone procures complete satisfaction, happiness even."

**October 8, 1955**<sup>151</sup>

She complained: "Everyone is happy. Except me. I am not happy because I feel like a very old, used, dank, grey rag". Her complaints were about loneliness, rejection, bitterness, longing.

**January 14, 1956**<sup>152</sup>

"Tom is far happier than I, but he is not the hausfrau."

**January 25, 1956**<sup>153</sup>

"Ah me, I miss the places, I miss the adored, lost, loony people. I am awfully tired of servant problems and civilisation."

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<sup>150</sup> Sunset and Twilight, p. 379.

<sup>151</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 331.

<sup>152</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 331,

<sup>153</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 331-332.

Martha wrote to BB, long after he stopped sending her letters.

### **August 17, 1959**

Just one and a half month before BB's death, Martha wrote about a society meeting in London, among the other guests writer Ivy Compton-Burnett<sup>154</sup>: „Miss Ivy CB, the reconised lion of the gathering, spoke from time to time like a prissy machine-gun; little burst of clipped and refined words about nothing much. ... Miss CB looks like a 19th century governess who has not yet been arraigned for murder, but will be. ... She has a vague suggestion of a mouth, and small ball-bearing eyes. ... She is very scary and perhaps 70. ... Presently there arrived, as a sort of filler, a young fairy named James Pope-Henessy<sup>155</sup>, who had the wit to keep his mouth shut, and then Christopher Sykes<sup>156</sup>, who is quite fat and has as terrific mouth wiggling stammer and is nice, really nice, and given to laughter; a quality non of the ladies seemed to go in for much. ... I must have seemed a sort of transatlantic waif, beached on Belgravia.“<sup>157</sup>

After BB's death she adressed some letters to BB's close aid Nicky Mariano.

### **June 15, 1963<sup>158</sup>**

In the later years she kept an all together positive picture of Berenson. In a letter to Diana Cooper she called him with his own slogan a "life enhancer".<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ivy Compton Burnett (1884-1989), British writer of novels and stories.

<sup>155</sup> James Pope-Henessy (1916-1974), biographer and travel writer.

<sup>156</sup> Chistopher Sykes (1907-1986), British dipomat and writer.

<sup>157</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 316.

<sup>158</sup> Moorehead, Letters, p. 302.

<sup>159</sup> BB often used the word life-enhancing. Art should be life-enhancing. (Secrest p. 381)

**July 18, 1966**<sup>160</sup>

In a letter to Lucy Moorehead she wrote: “When BB was about 90, I said to him ,what is life about? You ought to know by now, if anybody does’; he said ,work and love ... which is the building and love is the windows’.”

**November 27, 1969**<sup>161</sup>

In a letter to George Palocz-Horvarth from Africa she repeated the words: “Now twenty years have passed and I know he was right. I have no building and no windows.”

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<sup>160</sup> Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 326

<sup>161</sup> Moorehead, Letters, p 351.

## Conclusion

The main question was: for what reason EH had chosen BB as a partner for an eight year long correspondence? And what was Berenson's motivation to accept him?

It seems that Hemingway looked for some help, some psychological support, some inspiration and encouragement in a difficult situation of his life. But BB was no guru like Krishnamurti<sup>162</sup> was for Henry Miller. He was no esoteric and could not offer advice or help in personal dilemmas and crises. BB could only present himself through his personality and his knowledge in matters of the visual arts.

Hemingway said BB was his teacher and his master. He had helped to educate him through his books. He said: "I have so much to learn." He showed himself modest and humble. He looked up to him als his „hero“, his guru, nearly as a salvator, somebody who could give him spiritual enlightenment. Hemingway was very much aware of his cultural inferiority and uneducatedness. He said his son Patrick, who had been at Harvard University, was so much more intelligent than him. He often excused himself to "bother" BB with his „dull and stupid" letters. He said: "I write them instead of stories and they are a luxury that gives me pleasure and I hope they give you some too."<sup>163</sup>

Hemingway was extremely warm and affectionate with BB. For Brasch "the tenderness suggests ... that Hemingway was seeking not only the approval, but also the affection of a father."<sup>164</sup> Indeed EH called him his "brother and father".

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<sup>162</sup> Krishnamurti visited "I Tatti" on May 7, 1956.

<sup>163</sup> (quote Baker, Selected Letters XXI).

<sup>164</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 55.



In his worshipping Hemingway went completely over the top. He called BB his best friend, his hero: "You only, you who I love". He said Berenson merited the Nobel Prize more than himself – not mentioning that the prize was for literature, while BB did not produce prose or poems. Only once he understood that he exaggerated, that his letters were "too loving" for somebody you had never met.

It was clear that they did not have the same cultural basis. The common ground of the two so different personalities was poor. Hemingway had no real interest in old Renaissance paintings – BB's favorite field of knowledge. The Uffizi in Florence – for Berenson temples of art – "knocked him out" with "all that damned madonnas".<sup>165</sup> On the other hand EH had a certain feeling for modern painters, some of them he personally got to know in his Paris years, and some of their paintings he owned. BB hated modern art. For him Picasso was a "Satan" and Pollock's paintings could be only used as "tapestries".<sup>166</sup> When EH mentioned writers and painters it was more a name dropping, anecdotal and nearly never he said something important.

BB sent several of his books to Hemingway, but he doubted that EH read and understood them. For sure Hemingway's proclaimed appreciations of the books were completely exaggerated and with no detail. Mary went over the top to compare "Aesthetic and History" with her "favorite champagne". Hemingway was no intellectual and

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<sup>165</sup> In a letter to Mary, while she was staying in Florence: „I'll bet even you get tired in the Uffizi, That was the gallery, that used to really knock me out.“ (Letter November 20, 1948).

<sup>166</sup> His book „Seeing and Knowing“ (1951) was an attack on the contemporary abstract art and Picasso in person. In his diary April 11, 1952, *Sunset and Twilight* p. 258 about modern artists: "What do they offer ... but images of low life, of vulgarity, of animalism of the grossest and most perversely exciting kind!" In his diary June 30, 1953 after visiting a Picasso exhibition in Rome: Picasso plunged "deeper and deeper into infantilism ... Anybody can take paints and produce something that looks very like a Picasso. ... this pathology of the arts." (*Sunset and Twilight*), p. 314.) Marc Chagall is "rather childish", he noted after a visit of the painter in "I Tatti" on December 1, 1954, *Sunset and Twilight*, p. 362.

could not fully understand philosopher George Santayana, recommended by BB. And he depreciated him as “chickenshit”.

Brasch tends to exaggerate the affinity of the „two strangely similar spirits“. <sup>167</sup> He speaks of the “mutual sincerity, compassion and admiration“. <sup>168</sup> He wrote: “Perhaps most important, both men saw and celebrated nature as if it were a work of art.“ <sup>169</sup> But as in art their attitude to nature was very different from each other. To BB “the beauty of nature was on a par with that encountered in a famous art gallery, and he gave it the same aesthetic response.“ <sup>170</sup> It mostly was the idyllic landscape of Tuscany. Hemingway instead liked the rough wilderness and emptiness of nature, and he preferred nature with game to hunt. BB had the eyes of a painter, Hemingway the eyes of a hunter and fisherman.

Brasch and Secrest, who looked into the letters concluded that EH’s letters showed a much different man than the ultramasculine image that EH tried to project of himself. <sup>171</sup> Secrest: “His letters to Berenson are a delight, full of wit, anecdote, and imaginative inventions. They are rambling and discursive, with much parenthetical exclamation and explanation, and are, in fact, so spontaneous that they will banish forever the image of Hemingway as an anguished writer painfully producing a sentence every third day.“ <sup>172</sup> They are indomitable and life-enhancing letters, written in a laboured hand, like a child learning to write. They show a wistful, tender and loving man, transparently insecure, and one diametrically opposite to the

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<sup>167</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 51.

<sup>168</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 53.

<sup>169</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 52.

<sup>170</sup> Secrest, p. 13.

<sup>171</sup> Brasch, Christ, p. 64; Secrest p. 376.

<sup>172</sup> Writing novels remained hard labor for Hemingway. Every day he counted the words, not the pages he had written. And after that followed a long period of rewriting and correcting. Only in his letters he let himself go and they show it.

almost ludicrous ultramasculine image offered to the world."<sup>173</sup> Hemingway opened up intimate feelings to BB, but spared out the hopeless love for his Venetian Muse Adriana Ivancich that dominated the years of his correspondence from 1949 to 1955.<sup>174</sup>

Secrest: "In contrast to the wit and irrepressible zest of Hemingway's letters, Berenson's sound drearily rational, recalcitrantly sane."<sup>175</sup> With all Hemingway's opening up, BB on his side „appeared not to see the man beneath his facade, he seemed transfixed by the public view, as seen in the latest LIFE magazines, of a hard-drinking, hard-fighting, hard-whoring man".<sup>176</sup>

It is true, the EH letters give a rare insight in Hemingway's inner life. But Brasch and Secrest tend to exaggerate the quality of his letters. These are often chaotic, jumping from one topic to the other, interrupting, picking up again at another point, often trying to be funny at all cost. Never elaborating one theme. They were below the cultural level BB was used to. Berenson at one point thought some letters were written when Hemingway was drunk.

Berenson had a vast correspondence with many partners. He wrote: "When one's own mental state refuses to become creative, remains obstinately impotent, then the ink that is in me searches an outlet and finds it in letter-writing."<sup>177</sup> But the exchange with Hemingway took a special place. Meryle Secrest's judgment is again very positive:

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<sup>173</sup> Secrest, p. 376.

<sup>174</sup> Jobst C. Knigge: Hemingway's Venetian Muse Adriana Ivancich. He had no inhibition to open up for instance to his friend and agent Hotchner in January 1950: „My damned heart ... sliced straight in half." (quoted Reynolds, Hemingway, The Final Years, p. 217). To his Publisher Scribner: his heart felt like „beeing fed into a meat grinder" (March 22, 1950, Reynolds, Hemingway. The Final Years, p. 220.)

<sup>175</sup> Secrest, p. 377.

<sup>176</sup> Secrest, p. 376-377.

<sup>177</sup> Bernard Berenson, Sketch for a Self-Portrait, p. 13.

“One of the most interesting and inconclusive of Berenson’s friendships was with the writer Ernest Hemingway.”<sup>178</sup> Biographer Ernest Samuel found that BB had a “solicitous interest” in Hemingway and his letters. “The delighted Berenson did what he could to keep the confidences, wartime reminiscences, rough-hewn fantasies, outrageous anecdotes, and unorthodox opinions flowing.”<sup>179</sup> He wanted to know about the writers and artists Hemingway had known. He asked several times for information about Martha Gellhorn.

For sure BB had a certain vanity, and being so closely associated with perhaps the most famous writer of the moment – especially after the Nobel Prize – was important for him. And with the letters flowing his interest and sympathy for Hemingway was growing. But friendship seems a bit exaggerated for the fact that both did not meet personally and in spite of their letters did not know very much of each other.

BB explained that he “craved for affection”<sup>180</sup>, and Hemingway offered this affection to him. But it is more than questionable that BB felt the same. BB had his reservation and avoided a personal contact with EH. “Friendliness and warmth were certainly on a limited side”, remembered art scholar Myron Laskin, who knew BB well. In a letter in March 1953 BB made the difference between him and EH absolutely clear. There are “the likes” of EH “who exercise to the utmost all one’s animal functions” and call that living. In that sense he has “never lived”.

BB “devised the German term ‘unsereins’ [we] to describe the honorary citizens of his Little Kingdom.”<sup>181</sup> But the circle does not

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<sup>178</sup> Secrest, p. 376.

<sup>179</sup> Ernest Samuel, Berenson, p. 518.

<sup>180</sup> My Dear BB, p. 245.

<sup>181</sup> Silvia Sprigge, Berenson, London 1960, p. 267.

seem to have been too exclusive. He wrote about "the variety of people who came to I Tatti. ... They are of all Western nations, excluding none, and even Hindus and Japanese."<sup>182</sup> But for Hemingway strangely the doors were barred. It remains a certain mystery what happened when Hemingway finally wanted to see his master in spring 1954. In nearly all his letters Berenson had professed his eagerness to see the letter-writer "in flesh". But then obviously he got cold feet and tried to discourage his venue. Hemingway was hurt and very disappointed. In the next two years both continued to underline their wishes to see each other but without concrete results. Their friendship remained on paper.

BB knew most of EH's writing. But he always appreciated only parts of it. For sure he thought "The Old Man" was a small masterpiece. Generally he had reservations about modern literature. On May 7, 1957 he wrote after a visit of Steinbeck: "I fear that like Faulkner, like Hemingway, he has come to the end of his tether, has written himself out and does not know next."<sup>183</sup> BB preferred the classic literature. When Benedict Nicolson visited "I Tatti" shortly after the Second World War, he wanted to talk with BB about poet T.S. Eliot. But "BB could'nt bear the modern movements in paintings or literature."<sup>184</sup>

Berenson was in contact with all kind of people, also socialites like Jacqueline Bouvier. He enjoyed gossip.<sup>185</sup> From EH he wished to have some information about the people Hemingway knew, for instance about writer Thomas Wolfe, about Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, André Malraux, Pablo Picasso.

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<sup>182</sup> Sunset and Twilight, November 15, 1954, p. 361.

<sup>183</sup> Sunset and Twilight, May 7, 1957, p. 477-478.

<sup>184</sup> Secrest, p. 370. Berenson in Sunset and Twilight p. 171, August 26, 1950: "Almost impossible for me to appreciate what is good in T.S. Eliot."

<sup>185</sup> My Dear BB, p. XIII. Sprigge, Berenson, p. 267: "With Lady Colefax he corresponded for over forty years. She wrote him all the gossip of London, and since she gathered all the chief political, literary and journalistic figures around her lunch table, it was good gossip."

Martha Gellhorn's relationship with BB was of a quite different quality. At the beginning she had a "big curiosity" for BB and looked "for wisdom and knowledge". But unlike Hemingway's flattering she often had the courage to attack and criticise BB. ("You are too fabriqué"). Martha had the privilege to meet BB in person, or in Florence or in Rome. At one point she concluded she was seeing him "more than reasonable". In letters to other persons she was more than negative about BB. She had doubts about his sincerity. "He is a sort of failure." He is "not interesting, not inspiring". "He has no fire and richness inside." The main contents of her letters to BB were complaints about her own life.

For Berenson, Martha was a minor person in his circle. In his diaries he mentioned her only once without naming her. But in a certain way he felt attracted and rejected by her. He spoke of a psychological cat-and-mouse-game between them.

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